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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH UNHCR ASIA/PACIFIC DIRECTOR  
LIM

REF: A) PHNOM PENH 1678, B) HANOI 2864

1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met on November 24 with Janet Lim, the new Asia/Pacific Bureau Chief for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Describing an earlier meeting with VFM Le Van Bang as "very good," Lim said that VFM Bang had told her that the GVN wants to work with the UNHCR and "other agencies" to provide assistance to the Central Highlands. Lim described the UNHCR's frustrations with the situation in Phnom Penh in which Montagnards selected for resettlement neither want to accept resettlement nor return to Vietnam. The UNHCR is asking the Cambodian Government for "space and time" to reach a level of comfort with this group of Montagnards. Lim expressed concern about "manipulation" of the issue by certain individuals, but had no further information to provide. In response to the Ambassador's request, Lim pledged to provide further information on the places of origin of the Montagnards to help target these locations for possible assistance. Lim also briefly relayed a few comments by the Chinese Ambassador to Geneva about the North Korean refugee issue. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The Ambassador met on November 24 with Janet Lim, the new Asia/Pacific Bureau Chief for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Lim was joined by UNHCR Vietnam Country Representative Vu Anh Son. Poloff also attended. Lim opened by noting that she had taken up her position in September, and that this was her first trip to Vietnam in her new capacity. The trip was at the invitation of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), she said.

3. (SBU) Lim emphasized that she had a "very good meeting" with MFA Vice Minister Le Van Bang earlier in the day. VFM Bang had told her that the GVN and UNHCR need to "work together" to resolve the situation in Cambodia. He also said that the GVN wants to work with the UNHCR and "other agencies" to provide assistance to the Central Highlands. "He seemed to be speaking with authority," Lim commented. With GVN concurrence, the UNHCR could provide some aid to those attempted migrants who had asylum requests rejected and were returned to the highlands. The Ambassador noted that her experience stands in contrast to his meeting with VFM Bang the week before, in which he had raised similar points but received a less positive response.

4. (SBU) Providing an update on the current situation in Cambodia, Lim said that there are currently 566 Montagnards under UNHCR care, including 22 who had arrived in the previous week. Of this group, 303 cases have been considered for asylum (amounting to 401 individuals), and among them 183 cases were recognized as valid and 120 were refused; this amounts to a 60 percent acceptance rate, Lim noted. The UNHCR is faced with a difficult situation regarding both the Montagnards who were rejected and the Montagnards who were accepted but subsequently said they do not want to accept resettlement abroad and also do not want to return to Vietnam (Ref. A). The Cambodian Government (RGC) has told the UNHCR that these individuals cannot stay, although forced return is "not acceptable" to the UNHCR, Lim said. The UNHCR is "pushing the RGC for space and time," and trying to develop a "level of comfort" among the Montagnards that could lead to voluntary return. "If they still won't return, things may be taken out of our hands," and the RGC might begin forced repatriations, Lim warned.

5. (SBU) A number of leaders among the refugee group appear to be directing asylees to refuse resettlement, Lim continued. Of the 148 cases submitted for resettlement in the United States, 38 individuals have indicated that they wish to go, while 101 have rejected resettlement (she did not elaborate on the remaining nine cases). Some individuals have indicated that they wish to accept resettlement, but are under social pressure not to do so. In response to the Ambassador's question, Lim said, "clearly there is manipulation" of the issue, but it is not evident who is conducting it. She expressed concern about the politicization of the issue, noting that outside manipulation of the refugees will undermine the UNHCR's program. "If the system is being manipulated, our

obligation ends," she warned.

16. (SBU) The UNHCR is now "pre-counseling" Montagnards in Cambodia (at the border and before initiating a formal review of refugee qualifications) about what the refugee process entails. "We explain this is not about getting land back," Lim said. As a result of this pre-counseling, some Montagnards voluntarily return to Vietnam without filing claims. The UNHCR in Phnom Penh has heard that the thirteen Montagnards who returned to Vietnam on their own are now the subject of rumors that they were sent home by the UNHCR and told to convince other Montagnards in Vietnam to flee abroad (Ref. B). The Ambassador said that the GVN informed us that the thirteen had returned home safely, but that we have not been able to confirm this on our own. Lim said that another six Montagnards have returned on their own volition.

17. (SBU) Most of the Montagnards requesting asylum came from areas within ten kilometers of the Vietnam-Cambodia border, Lim said. The Ambassador requested the UNHCR to provide more detailed information about the places of origin of the Montagnards to help possible efforts to target them for assistance. Lim promised to do so through their office in Bangkok. The UNHCR is seeking to expand its Hanoi office and introduce international staff. "If the Vietnamese expect us to provide assistance in the Central Highlands, we will need a larger staff," she stated. The Ambassador suggested that UNHCR raise the issue with the GVN "as a test of good faith."

18. (SBU) Touching briefly on North Korean refugees, Lim said that she is in contact with the Chinese Ambassador in Geneva. The PRC Ambassador had said that "the most important thing to China is the six-party talks," but that the Chinese are frustrated with the United States. "The more [the U.S.] puts Korean refugees in the public arena, the more we must show our good faith to the North Koreans," the PRC Ambassador reportedly said.

MARINE